

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH SERGEANT MAJOR LEON CAFFIE, ARMY RESERVE COMMAND, VIA TELECONFERENCE TIME: 2:00 P.M. EDT DATE: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2009

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LINDY KYZER (Army Public Affairs): This is Lindy Kyzer with Army Public Affairs. We are very pleased to have with us Command Sergeant Major Leon Caffie. He is the Army Reserve Command sergeant major. He is going to be talking about the year of the NCO and some of the amazing Army Reserve NCOs that he works with every day.

So, without further ado, I will turn it over to you, Command Sergeant Major.

SGT. MAJ. CAFFIE: Good afternoon. Just first off I'd say it's a pleasure to join you today on this conversation blog. The U.S. Army Noncommissioned Officer Corps has distinguished itself as the world's most accomplished group of military professionals for over 200 years. We still remain the image by which other militaries judge their ability to perform at the level of today's military. In recognition of the commitment to service and willingness to make great sacrifice on behalf of the nation, the secretary of the Army has established 2009 as the Year of the Noncommissioned Officer. Throughout 2009 the Army will honor NCOs through their initiative and events that honor our NCOs and their families for their service and sacrifice. (Inaudible) -- Army NCO -- (inaudible) -- internal and external audience to enhance the awareness and public understanding of the roles and responsibilities of today's NCO corps, to enhance and accelerate development of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps through education, fitness, leadership and development initiative, and to preserve the strength of our all-volunteer Army.

This is particularly interesting when it is related to the Army Reserve, is that we bring so much more to the fight because of the civilian-acquired skills that my young men and women do in their neighborhoods across this great country that we live in. Those civilian-acquired skills could be anything from firemen and doctors, medics, paramedics, police officers, engineers, teachers, x-ray technicians. We bring so much to the fight. The Army and the nation is indebted to the United States Army Reserve soldiers for their patriotism and their continued sacrifice on this war against terror.

So I'm extremely proud to serve with these great patriots, the young men and women that make up this organization. As of today, we're almost 205 strong. We expect to be 206 strong prior to September 31st of this year. The quality of the Army Reserve soldiers is the best I've seen in my 38 years of military service. Today's Army Reserve soldier is a member of the best-trained,

best-led, best- equipped fighter force in the nation. I get requests from my peers from time to time to travel to other countries to talk about the accomplishments of the noncommissioned officers, and what most countries -- (inaudible) -- from their NATO-Warsaw Pact, their very image of their noncommissioned officer corps.

You may not be aware, but typically in those countries officers usually make all the decisions, but only an American military where we have an established, cherished professional standard called the Noncommissioned Officer Corps. And throughout this year the Army Reserve, under the leadership of Lieutenant General Jack Stultz, will pay tribute and homage to the sacrifices and the patriotism of these young men and women in their hometowns throughout this great country, through any media that's possible, to ensure that the citizens who live in those communities understand but most of all get to know the joy of having these young men in our corps.

I would like to discuss two of these young soldiers with you briefly: Sergeant Major David Obray of Full 92nd Engineer Company out of Minnesota. He's an Army Reserve soldier who understands the balancing act. He weighed over 300 pounds when he decided to join the United States Army Reserve. His mentor and the person that he looked up to was his older brother. When his brother joined the military, he had to make a decision how he would lose the excess weight to be able to join the military. He's featured this month in Men's Fitness magazine. He's also the United States Army Soldier of the Year. He lost 300 (sic) pounds but he also was able to capture the crown of being the best enlisted soldier in the United States Army. His balancing act is that he is enrolled in Winona State University, but he's also served as the Army Reserve ambassador and inspiring young men and women across this country to join the Army Reserve.

The second soldier is an American patriot but he's also a hero: Army Reserve Sergeant Greg Ruske, a juvenile corrections officer with the Colorado City, Colorado Corrections Department. He made the right decision while on patrol in Afghanistan when a Taliban insurgent attacked Ruske's group by pure luck, I'm told, and wounded Ruske and others. Despite his injuries, this NCO took charge, exposed himself to the enemy fire, and led the successful rescue of a wounded Afghan National Police officer. When I asked Sergeant Ruske, are you a hero, he simply replied, no, Command Sergeant Major, I'm a soldier who was faced with some extraordinary circumstances. I'm simply a soldier that applied my training and my leadership to this situation. I'm simply an ordinary American soldier.

It's young men like Ruske and Obray that give me the stamina, the fire, the desire to do the things I do. We've got soldiers in 20 countries around the world, approximately 28,000 -- (inaudible) -- soldiers deployed. Their families are home supporting them, and this year I'm honored to be a part of this organization to pay tribute to a fine group of American patriots that are noncommissioned officers of the United States Army Reserve. Thank you.

MS. KYZER: Thank you, Command Sergeant Major. And now Rob Stewart with NCOcall.com, did you have a question?

Q Yes, Sergeant Major, I'm glad to be talking to you today.

SGT. MAJ. CAFFIE: Thank you. My pleasure.

Q The reserve components have a lot of unique challenges when it comes to training, based on your meeting one weekend a month, your 14-to-21-day ATs, your 15-to-21-day ATs, but what are the unique considerations when it comes to mentoring younger NCOs? Because I'm a firm believer that senior NCOs, it's their responsibility to mentor these junior NCOs, but what are the unique challenges that reserve components face trying to mentor these young heroes?

SGT. MAJ. CAFFIE: Well, first of all I thank you for your question. Today's Army Reserves operational force long passes the 14 days annual training the one weekend a month Battle Assembly drills. My young soldiers show much more complex, much more intelligence in the tasks and the job skills that they possess -- demands a certain deal. We have gotten away from the traditional Battle Assembly of one weekend a month, thinking outside the proverbial box and getting soldiers involved in the decision-making process. Based on the needs of the organization, you may drill Thursday night, Friday night, Wednesday night or Tuesday night. Now, let's talk -- address your motivation. Clearly the most important individuals in this organization is not General Stultz or I. It's the young men and women who step forward on a consistent basis and say, I want to perform.

And the way you inspire and motivate them is that you make them a part of the organization, you let them participate in the decision-making process. You don't stack them in a room and fill them with -- give them a manual and tell them to read paragraph five and let's discuss it next month. These kids are extremely well educated, bright, and they are very articulate and they write extremely well. We motivate and inspire them by allowing them to be part of the decision-making process.

Clearly these young men and women are the future leaders of tomorrow's United States Army Reserve. Unless they buy into what we are trying to do, they will simply say, I don't want to play your game anymore and I'm going home, because we deal with a volunteer Army. They are there not because they're ordered; they're there because they want to be. In my direction to all of my command sergeant majors within this organization is that let's protect our most important resource. It's not weapons and bullets or trucks; it's the young men and women that have volunteered to serve in this organization. We have the best retention rate among all three branches of the military: the Army, the National Guard and the active Army. Why? Because we don't see them as simply a uniform. We see them as a soldier who brings certain specific skills and assets to this organization.

And what these young men and women -- some of them have been deployed two or three times and they're still with me, and for that this old command sergeant major is ever grateful.

Q Thank you.

MS. KYZER: Okay, and Devie (ph), with My Side of the Puddle, did you have a question?

Q I do -- not sure if you're going to be able to answer it or not, but --

SGT. MAJ. CAFFIE: I'll give it a shot.

Q We appreciate that. There's been a lot of -- a lot of talk about the VA proposal to require private health insurance companies to reimburse the VA for medical care.

SGT. MAJ. CAFFIE: Yes. Q And from my analysis of that, I'm looking at two groups of soldiers who are going to be -- are going to have the greatest impact, one being retirees or those who are medically retired, and our reserve soldiers. And I have not seen anything official from the U.S. Army Reserve about this policy and I'm wondering if you have a statement on that.

SGT. MAJ. CAFFIE: I'm familiar with the policy and I -- this is not an official statement because I think that's more within General Stultz' area of responsibility.

Q Okay.

SGT. MAJ. CAFFIE: If I can give you an old command sergeant major's assessment of where we are today based on where we have been years ago, it was unheard of to have TRICARE for Army Reserve soldiers. Let me go back to 2002 when I was mobilized and deployed and I took my command to Fort Polk, Louisiana and eventually to Kuwait and eventually into Iraq. In fact, most of my soldiers did not have dental care or a dental plan. Most of my soldiers didn't have a health plan, nor did their family. When we arrived at the mobilization site, primarily we did a dental piece. There wasn't preventive measures taken. They were simply -- their teeth was simply extracted. In my many years of service never have we had so many soldiers who cannot afford health care through TRICARE Reserve Component.

We're not where we need to be because my soldiers hail from small towns and villages and cities all over this great country. TRICARE -- a doctor has to submit as a participant in this program. Because there are so many physicians, it limits the number of physicians that my soldiers can become patients of who accept TRICARE. The problem, it appears to me, if you live in Tupelo, Mississippi -- now, hypothetically -- and there is not a physician that commits to TRICARE, they have to go to the next city to find that physician.

So my problem with TRICARE is that I would love to have more physicians within the TRICARE community. That was the discussion point where if Army Reserve soldiers reach 20 years of military service and they decide to get out and not remain as a drilling reservist, their TRICARE Reserve Component no longer exists. What if we allow them to remain in TRICARE, put more participants in the program? That is one option that has been made to the TRICARE -- the military aspect of what we would like to see.

On veterans who are military-connected, (basically ?) those individuals whose injury is a result of their combat -- they are service-connected, there shouldn't be any change in their medical treatment, and they do it by percentage, based on the injury.

I don't necessary agree with that theory. I think we got to start somewhere. I'm very optimistic that we would be able to change some of the things that we're doing with VA, and make it more applicable to the Reserve soldiers, as well as the National Guard soldiers as well.

MS. KYZER: Great, -- (inaudible) --

MAJOR CAFFIE: I don't know whether I answered your a question, but I gave you this old Command Sergeant Major's version.

Q All right. I appreciate that.

SGT. MAJOR CAFFIE: Thank you.

MS. KYZER: And we had one other person join on the line, mid- call. Is there anyone else with a question?

Q Yeah, this is Master Sergeant Keith Johnson (sp).

I've got a question for Sergeant Major. We met last year when I was doing a tour of ESARC. I was on the Public Affairs for the -- (inaudible) -- Group. And this has to do with the Year of the NCO.

SGT. MAJOR CAFFIE: Okay. Hey, Master Sergeant. How you doing?

Q I'm doing fantastic.

SGT. MAJOR CAFFIE: All right.

Q Every day's a little bit better.

I have a question about the Command Sergeant Major board for the Reserve side. Now, I know the command sergeant major is supposed to be nonMOS-specific -- take any position. But, I've noticed in the last few boards that they're assigning people to units that they have no -- absolutely no experience in.

For example, the Public Affairs Operations Center command sergeant major slot they put (an) 11 Bravo person in it who has no Public Affairs experience at all.

SGT. MAJOR CAFFIE: Okay. Okay, let me --

Q Is there any guidelines on -- I mean, as far as trying to match up a person? You know, if somebody spends 30 years in transportation, does it make any sense to put him in a chemical unit?

SGT. MAJOR CAFFIE: Yeah. Let me ask you a question this way: Eventually, I think there's someone who questions whether we're going to do away with the (double-zulu 50 ?), and that's how we identify a command sergeant major, and go back to MOS specific -- if you're an 8- 8, you become a 88. Let me tell you how I look at promotion boards and how we manage command sergeant majors. As a master sergeant you bring certain operational skills to your MOS. Now, how do I enhance your operational skills? By getting you into a Battle Staff course. A Battle Staff course would teach you every aspect of the Army, whether it's combat arms, combat service, or combat service support. I think its imperative that you know that.

Q Right. SGT. MAJOR CAFFIE: As you make promotion to a sergeant major you still are MOS specific, but you're getting more into an operational venue. And that Battle Staff course, it enhances your ability to work in an operational environment.

Once you are selected to become a command sergeant major it's no longer MOS specific. It's against management. It's about motivation. It's about getting soldiers training. It's about inspiring them to stay physically fit.

So, it's not imperative that you work -- you have a 54-MOS, and I think it's chemical, if I'm not wrong, it's not to have a chemical battalion with a 80 (might ?) command sergeant major (double-zulu 50 ?), because it's not imperative to me that he know anything about transportation, but more important he know how to manage soldiers, he know how to inspire soldiers.

He can establish esprit de corps within that organization. He can take that battalion and turn it into a tight-knit operational unit that relies on each other but also respect the abilities of each other. That's the difference between management, as a command sergeant major.

What I'm tasked with, as a command sergeant major United States Army Reserve, I'm an adviser to Lieutenant General (Stokes ?) on physical fitness, their readiness, their training, and what pitfalls -- that's when the NCO -- (inaudible) --.

How do I solicit information? I solicit information by talking to soldiers in the trenches. Tell me what you think we need to do? And my job is to inspire my soldiers to perform at a high level. And the way I do that is using the Army core values -- honesty, integrity, leadership, esprit de corps. Those are the values by which any command sergeant major should operate under. But, also bearing in mind that -- the Soldier's Creed. But, you become great listeners as well.

So, for me it's not -- it's not a prerequisite that a command sergeant major, who comes from this -- I'm a -- (inaudible) -- . I come up in the (combat arms arena ?). I hope I have the ability to motivate soldiers, regardless of whether they're a cook, or supply, or chemical or M.P. It's about leadership.

MS. KYZER: Okay, thank you, Command Sergeant Major.

I'll open the floor to any other questions that anyone else has.

Q Yes, this is Rob Stewart again.

SGT. MAJOR CAFFIE: Hey Rob.

Q Sergeant Major, I just retired so I spent a lot of years on active duty and went into the Reserve Components myself; finished out my career as -- (inaudible) --. So, I was absolutely amazed at Reserve Component soldiers and the skill-sets, especially that they bring o deployments.

SGT. MAJOR CAFFIE: Yes.

Q Because I was an infantry guy, and an infantry guy does infantry stuff for 20 years, but that's all he knows. Could you expand on what the Reserve Component soldiers bring for those additional skill-sets, especially to a deployment?

SGT. MAJOR CAFFIE: I thank you, Rob, for the question.

I got a call from a (Corps ?) commander, and he said, " -- (inaudible) -- command sergeant major, General (Stokes ?) told me you have a background in law enforcement." And I said, yes, sir, I do. He said, "Let me tell you what I'm looking for. I'm looking an individual, regardless of enlisted or officer, who possesses certain skills, and those skills I cannot find in the Active Component."

"I'm looking for someone who has great interview and interrogation experience, someone who can analyze non-verbal communication, someone who has -- (inaudible) -skills, and someone who can write well." He said, "I'm looking for someone outside the Army Active Component who possesses those skill-sets."

Sir, I got the person for you. That's a prerequisite for any forensic investigator with most law enforcement agencies in the United States. So, I looked within my M.P. community and I identified a certain individual who possessed those skills. That's one way we bring uniqueness to the fight.

The other part is that you take, for example, a truck driver. I got truck drivers, (somewhere) in the neighborhood of 14,000 of them in the Army Reserve. Some own their own trucks -- may not financially feasible to do so now, but they have been driving for professionally for years. They bring this skill-set to the Army Reserve.

It became so prevalent when we -- I was deployed to the theater in 2002, and I had worked at that time in the 377th Theatre Sustainment Command, and they had 43,500 soldiers under him. And part of that was a transportations piece. We hauled everything from bullets, to food to ammunition, to cots, to port-a-johns north to Baghdad in some very hazardous conditions -- constantly being attacked by the enemy. The men and women that drove professionally was an exception to the rule. That's one skill-set.

One of the individuals that is doing a remarkable job in Iraq is a engineer. He's a professional engineer at Notre Dame University -- Brigadier General Callie (ph). The (combatant ?) commander rave about his skill-sets and his ability to get things done.

I spoke to young man with the 100th battalion at Fort Hood, Texas. He's getting ready to go over with the only infantry battalion I have, the 100th battalion. And General Stokes (sp) and I walked, and we talked to these young kids. And General Stokes asked this young man, and said, what do you do -- a young specialist, probably in the neighborhood of 26, 28 years of age. He said, "Well, I'm a student." So, he (said), where are you working on your bachelor's degree? He said, "I'm getting my Ph.D. in physics."

And yet the next young man was spending next to him, and he asked him and said, what do you do, young man? He said, "I'm a airline pilot for Delta Airlines." I am continually amazed by what these young men and women do. And they still continue to serve in the military when they don't have to. They do it because of their patriotism. They do it because they believe in our way of life. But, those are some of the skill-sets that these young men and women bring to the fight.

I can tell you about the surgeon that came to see General Stokes (sp), and he was 50-some years of age. And said, "I've been successful. I'm a surgeon for the university, and I worked with this professional baseball team." And he has this big old championship ring on his hand, and said, "I want to serve. I want to go to the war zone and I want to save the lives of our

soldiers. I'm 52 years of age but I don't need to worry about a salary. I don't want a salary. I just want to serve."

So, when you look across my (rates ?), from -- some of the highest rate is surgeons in the United States who've joined just to serve. So, a young man that has an M.B.A. and a law degree, he's a aviation mechanic. When you ask him, and say why aren't you a Jag? "I don't want to be a Jag. I'm a mechanic -- I'm an aviation mechanic, as a master sergeant, and I love what I do."

So, that's what makes it great. It's why we do some of the things that we do.

Q Excellence. Thank you.

MS. KYZER: And, again, any other questions? Okay, we're right at almost a half hour, so we'll go ahead and wrap up.

I'll turn it over again to you, Command Sergeant Major. Did you have any closing remarks, or anything we didn't touch on that you wanted to highlight?

SGT. MAJOR CAFFIE: Well, thank you very much for allowing me to spend this time with you, and to express, some of the attributes of the soldiers that I call my heroes. And allow me to tell their story about that patriotism, that dedication, the sacrifices that their families have made -- the birthdays that they are missed, the graduations that they have missed, and the toll that it's taken on the family.

I am extremely fortunate to have families -- such as my soldiers, who have stood by them through this career. My family has been with me -- I've been married to the same girl for 37 years. She was there when I was deployed to Vietnam as a combat soldier, and she's still with me today. That's the reason why we were able to do some of the things that we do, and that's the reason why a soldier can perform to the level they can perform in.

So, thank you for this venue to allow me to talk about my greatest joy, my soldiers. Thank you very much.

MS. KYZER: Wonderful. Thank you so much for your time, Command Sergeant Major.

This concludes the roundtable. Thank you, everyone. END.